THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF HANNAH ARENDT

AUGUSTINE AND THE INVENTION OF MODERNITY

MICHAEL WEINMAN

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LOTM1	*The Life of the Mind, Vol. 1: Thinking*
LOTM2	*The Life of the Mind, Vol. 2: Willing*
LSA	*Love and Saint Augustine* (translation of *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*)
OR	*On Revolution*
OT	*Origins of Totalitarianism*
OV	*On Violence*
RP	"Religion and Politics"
RLR	"Reflections on Little Rock"
THC	*The Human Condition*

INTRODUCTION: REFIGURING ARENDT'S *CORPUS* AS INTERVENTIONS IN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

Hannah Arendt has recently come to be seen as a figure central to the growing interest in what is called, generally with reference to the work of Carl Schmitt or Giorgio Agamben, "political theology." Comparatively few of those participating in this scholarly conversation attend to Arendt's engagement with the influential work in politics and religion done by three of her German émigrée contemporaries: Eric Voegelin (on "the political religions"); Ernst Kantorowicz (on "sacred secrets of the state" and, more famously "the King's Two Bodies"); and Leo Strauss (on "Athens and Jerusalem," Spinoza's *Theological–Political Treatise* and Hobbes' *Leviathan*, among numerous other interventions). Arendt shares with these three contemporaries an urgent need to understand the irrational aspects of political life, both the particular perversions that made Fascist and National Socialist totalitarianism possible and the religious-like appeal of Bolshevism. Like these three, Arendt also acknowledges the traces of similar phenomena within liberal democracies. At the same time, her focus on spontaneity and her distrust of institutionalization, and of the bureaucratization and delegation adjacent to such institutionalization, provide her with a unique point of critical entry to political theology. What brings her close to Strauss, Voegelin, and Kantorowicz and what sets her apart merit much attention than is usually given.

Why so? Answering this question will require a careful critical reconstruction of the scholarly analysis of political theology since the 1920s, a task I aim to begin in Chapter 1 through a discussion of what Seyla Benhabib (2018:

190) has called "Weimar syndrome." But, in essence and in brief, we can say that while Arendt is rightly received as a critic of bureaucratic rationality like Habermas and other followers of Weber on the left, she is also, and I will argue more fundamentally, trying to correct Max Weber's error of attempting what cannot be done: the evacuation of normativity from the project of the human sciences. It is this that brings her work closest to that of Strauss, Voegelin, and Kantorowicz, for all their many and important disagreements. Arendt insists, like these critics of Weber, on an extra-rational—or at least non-rational—form of value commitment that binds together those who would act in public.

My attempt to situate Arendt in this conversation requires a critical review of the main ways in which the term "political theology" is deployed in contemporary conversations and how using it as a lens that permits an overview of selections from the entirety of Arendt's corpus adumbrates a distinctively different sense of the term. But before we can unpack these senses of what we mean by political theology, we need first to address what it means to take up Arendt as engaged in theological thought at all. This may, indeed, seem quite surprising, if not outright wrong-headed. After all, one might well ask, isn't Arendt a secular thinker, a non-observant German-Jewish philosopher (or political theorist)? What, then, does Arendt's work have to do with Christian theology and what does that theology have to do with our attempts to come to terms with her work at all, let alone as a necessary contribution to the discourse around political theology? To address these questions, we begin (in the next section) with a discussion of the juncture of Hannah Arendt's thinking and Christian theology, in critical conversation with John Kiess' (2016) *Hannah Arendt and Theology*.

From there, the analysis connects the debates of the 1920s with contemporary arguments about the limits of liberalism—in particular, two positions that will here be dubbed "New Augustinianism" and "Black Protestant Theology" as central, competing articulations of the contemporary importance of Augustine's thinking—before concluding that Arendt is an ideal interlocutor for a renovated liberalism as a political theology today insofar as she: (i) like both the New Augustinians and Black Protestant theologians engages (in *Origins* and elsewhere) substantially with the "dark side" of liberal modernity and its characteristic rationality; (ii) like Kantorowicz, Strauss, and Voegelin has a sophisticated and principled disagreement with a certain mainstream form of political liberalism and the narrative of progress; and yet (iii) unlike all those mentioned does not succumb to either an overly rejectionist or accepting response to what Arendt called "the tradition."

Hannah Arendt and (Liberalism as a Political) Theology

What is, as I am calling it here, New Augustinianism? I have in mind a certain approach to Augustine and the Augustinian tradition that understands itself as developing in the aftermath of the Second World War and as a response to

Hannah Arendt and *Origins* in particular. John Kiess (2016: 3) rightly observes: "There is a need for a fuller, more integrated picture of Hannah Arendt, one that situates her engagement with theology within the broader contours of her thought, and one that can help readers navigate the various responses her work has generated." And while Kiess (2016: 3) often makes good on his intention to take "stock of how Arendt appropriates or criticizes theological perspectives in the course of developing original positions" on core aspects of her thinking such as "evil, worldliness, natality, and the life of the mind," there are key respects in which his account seems nevertheless to occlude recourse to Arendt as a resource for expanding or improving our understanding of political theology. In this section, I first address two insights that Kiess develops out of Benhabib (1996) and Richard J. Bernstein's (1996) approaches to Arendt's work. I then go on to show why, notwithstanding his helpful expansion of the reception on Arendt through these thinkers and further theological resources relevant for understanding what these commentators are taking from her work, there are two key respects in which we still need, even after Kiess' intervention, a more fundamental reconstruction of the place of theological disputes in reading Arendt. And, on that basis, a renovation of our understanding of Arendt as an interlocutor within the discourse on political theology.

The first interpretive point that Kiess (2016: 125) emphasizes entirely correctly in my view—working in the wake of Benhabib's (1996: 90–91) account of how Arendt's basic worldview and life experiences inform her thinking about judgment—is that and why "Arendt's turn to worldliness represented an attempt to reflect more deeply upon the underlying conditions that enable us to exercise our basic human capacities," and her corresponding articulation of "citizenship in terms of the everyday task of forging a common world, a task sustained by the *amor mundi* of each citizen." Here we see the first and most principal debt to Augustine in her political thinking: the notion that, for all the perils involved in introducing emotional or passionate investment into the space of politics—and of bringing love into public, which as we will see troubles Arendt to no end, throughout her writing career—the standard liberal understanding of public life as an arena of deliberation and debate, of consensus and compromise, requires an amendment in which such rational commitments to democratic life are embedded within a prior and extra-rational, if not irrational, commitment to the possibility of sharing *this* world, the only one there is for humankind, with others. Moreover, others with whom we are—by no choice or contract of our own—in community. In this respect, as Kiess (2016: 125) rightly notes, Arendt "remained indebted to key Augustinian insights about the world's fragility and the importance of love in ensuring its ongoing existence."

It may well be that Arendt distances herself from Augustine insofar as the latter's conception of love ultimately leads one to a set of commitments that are other-worldly rather than this-worldly, insofar as she concludes, as

Kiess (2016: 126) puts it, that the church is primarily "a social 'body' bound together through charity [*caritas socialis*—MDW], not the worldly in-between of things"; this is a complex interpretive question to which we will devote ourselves in Chapter 1. All the same, as Kiess (2016: 127–28) argues in conversation with Benhabib's (1996: 14–22) discussion of Arendt's early work on Rahel Varnhagen, Arendt's thought is alive to the ways in which church communities, like the salons of the late eighteenth century "are not merely 'social' and certainly not unworldly; on the contrary, they serve as powerful alternative or experimental 'publics' that offer glimpses of new possibilities for the broader common world." Yet, as members of pluralist democratic societies, we may well not find ourselves at all called to build a world in common with those who "experiment" in such churches understood as latter-day salons; the avowedly extra-rational and non-contractual nature of membership and participation in these spaces entails that there is no way in advance to ensure that the convictions and aims that emerge in themselves contribute to the building of a world in common that is truly in common with other members of the democratic societies in which these churches are embedded.

This is the problem of democratic societies as inherently exclusionary, with which Arendt struggled throughout her career and which will haunt the argument of Chapters 2–4 as we try to uncover a positive and constructionist liberalism as a political theology out of Arendt's engagement with Augustine in her key mature works before setting Augustine directly into view as the object of analysis in Chapter 5. There, we will confront most directly the deepest faultline in Arendt's engagement with Augustine: how can it simultaneously be the case *both* that democratic citizenship, understood as the task of building the common world, is based on the love of the world *and* that love is a private capacity that dies if it is made public and upon which no action can rightly be based. That these views are both Arendt's—as we will see in detail below—is indisputable; that they are in tremendous conflict with one another, if not outright mutually exclusive, is also immediately clear. The main line of argument in this book will proceed in awareness of this deep faultline without trying to resolve it; in Chapter 5, I will argue that accepting the central lesson of Arendt's continual returns to Augustine in search of an antidote to a chronic illness in liberalism might well require that we abandon the second of these two commitments, in part at least, in order to preserve and extend the salutary benefits of the first.

In so arguing, I am surely in concert with the second of Kiess' core insights in trying to better integrate Arendt scholarship and contemporary debates in theology and ethics, namely, that Arendt is a needed voice for contemporary theological discussions of evil and that Arendt scholarship would benefit from listening further to what theologians are saying about evil in response to Arendt—though with an important amendment discussed below. As Kiess

(2016: 53) notes, our examination of this dimension of Arendt's engagement with Augustine begins with another head-scratching seeming paradox: "Arendt consistently and emphatically disavows the relevance of tradition in making sense of the unprecedented nature of totalitarian evil, and yet much of what she has to say about evil inadvertently confirms the continued relevance of the Augustinian tradition." This seeming paradox is best resolved, as Kiess (2016: 63) argues following Bernstein (1996: 139–53), if we understand the purported "changing of her mind" between the discussion of radical evil in *Origins* and the "banality of evil" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as not a changing-of-mind at all, but rather a shift of emphasis and a difference of argumentation regarding the reception of the tradition.

We will engage the details of this just below; for the moment, what is crucial is what lesson, on the best interpretation of Arendt on the problem of evil, ought we to draw for thinking about Arendt and the tradition, and in particular Augustine, today. For Kiess (2016: 54) it is that there is "a tendency in Arendt to dismiss traditional resources too prematurely and, in the case of the privation account, on the basis of a mischaracterization of the position in question" because "Arendt's disavowal of tradition is based upon one rather static conception of tradition," which for Kiess is neither the only nor the best "way to conceive tradition." Here, I disagree with Kiess in two ways. First, I do not believe that Arendt engages the tradition as static or one-sided; as we will see in detail in Chapters 1 and 3 especially, she is keenly attuned to the polyvocality within the tradition itself and the various ways in which it can be and has been taken up by both thinkers and actors since, especially, the Atlantic revolutions of the late-eighteenth century. Second, and more importantly, however static her notion of tradition is, it is undeniable that she considers it to be a "lost treasure": yes, we can engage with, and "dive for pearls and coral" among the various jewels that have been "left to us by no testament."[1] But, for Arendt, there is no possibility of retrieving and repurposing the wisdom of the past for the purposes of the present. This holds for Augustine's arguments as much as for anything else that Arendt admires in the tradition that "had its definite beginning in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle" and "came to a no less definite end in the theories of Karl Marx" (Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern Age": 17).

This matters, primarily, not for Arendt interpretation, but for the problem we face in trying to take up the task of building a world in common in a pluralist

[1] Fusing the image that she borrows from Walter Benjamin (1968: 50: "Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths, to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past—but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages.") with the aphorism of René Char with which Arendt (1993 [1968]: 3) begins the Preface to *Between Past and Future*.

democracy where we do not, in fact, share a tradition with all of our fellow citizens, but rather participate in and critically respond to different clusters of different strands of a tradition—call them "Athens and Jerusalem" or "Rome and Jerusalem" or "Athens and Alexandria/Constantinople" *and* "Rome and Jerusalem" and so on—that is no longer authoritative for us in any clear way. In this light, let us briefly review two key points in Arendt's reception of what she frames as "the tradition" that are essential to her understanding of Augustine and which Kiess reconstructs in less than the best light. Doing so will help us to see why I think he is mistaken about Arendt's rejectionism—not that I disagree that Arendt rejects the salience of tradition as we seek "to think without banisters," but rather that I think he is wrong to think that she is wrong in doing so. More importantly, though, it will help us to see why and how the best developed Arendtian line in response to Augustine—one that never quite entirely surfaced in her written works, but which is there to be uncovered—can help us articulate a better, renovated liberalism as a political theology that can do better than both the putatively secular, or largely secularized, articulations of liberalism and their expressly non-secular alternatives.

The first of the two points, discussed in greater detail below, is the afterlife of the Pelagian controversy. If we take the view of tradition and its contemporary salience that he advocates, then we might well draw the conclusion, as Kiess (2016: 2) does[2] that, in her appeal to "the Greek striving for immortality and the human capacity for spontaneity" Arendt "falls victim to precisely the Pelagian pride and optimism that Augustine and others warned against long ago." When Kiess (2016: 162–67) develops this argument in the fourth chapter of his book, he largely endorses the view of Charles Mathewes (2001), albeit in somewhat softer tones. I respond to Mathewes' argument to this effect in the following section, but for the moment let us note the chief point of conflict, which is that "Arendt relied upon Augustine for his basic insistence upon freedom," while "her own account of action 'effectively Pelagianizes' his thought by unmooring it from any account of grace." We can debate—and will in the following section—the extent to which Arendt, like many liberals, takes sides with the view of Pelagius and Celestius in their fifth-century controversy with Augustine—and in this way the extent to which Arendt "Pelagianizes" action. But the prior point and the one salient for our current concern of "what to do with the tradition" is that is only a problem that she is Augustinian about freedom and anti-Augustinian about action if, in the first place, we think that there is a stable and core "traditional" Augustine that needs to be accepted or rejected in the first place. But Arendt's attitude to Augustine's works is that, like other "pearls," they are there like lost treasure for us dive for and among, but

[2] Or at least cites Charles Mathewes (2001) as concluding (Kiess 2016: 9 n.6).

which we will never retrieve in their wholeness as they were meant for readers in their times—even if we wanted to so recover them.

The same holds for the second main point of difference between Kiess' attempt to bring Arendt scholarship and theology into a fuller engagement with one another, which in fact builds from this problem with Pelagianism and connects back with the problem of radical evil: it is the place of judgment in Kant's thought; in particular, his response to Leibniz and others on the idea of theodicy. With great justice, clarity, and concision, Kiess (2016: 84–86) reconstructs the ultimately Kantian character of Arendt's judgment of the Israeli court's failure to judge Adolf Eichmann in the manner she considered correct; namely, on the basis of his crimes against humanity with the court's competence settled by universal jurisdiction.[3] Kiess (2016: 86) connects this judgment to Arendt's call, in *Origins*, for recognition of the universal right to have rights because "responding to evil required nothing less than a recovery" of these rights for the rightless. As we will see in Chapter 5 and the Epilogue, I believe it is wrong to see Arendt as defending the "right to have rights" in Chapter 9 of *Origins*, but the basic point of agreement with Kiess is that the argument about universal jurisdiction in *Eichmann* must be read together with the "new law of the earth" that Arendt calls for in the first Preface to *Origins*.

More serious than a disagreement with Kiess' attempt to bring Arendt's Augustine more fully into conversation with standard views of her major works is that he neglects what Susan Neiman (2001: 66) has argued in providing a substantiation of Arendt's rather offhand remark that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a work of theodicy: the view that, in Jerusalem, "what was on trial was not (only) German war crimes, or Jewish complicity in them, but Creation itself." To come to terms with Arendt on evil, then, is not merely to settle her accounts with Augustine but also to directly address the ways in which Augustine's discussion of freedom (where Arendt largely borrows from him) and his discussion of action (where she disavows him) are accessible to her in response to Kant's own attempts to secularize practical thinking, so as to evade the antinomy of freedom and grace for which Mathewes takes Arendt to task for attempting to avoid in her "partial Augustinianism."

Thus, for all the virtues of Kiess' attempt to provide an overview of the "state of play" as regards Arendt's reception within theological discourses today, and notwithstanding the significant debt that my account owes to his treatment of Arendt as a voice with which contemporary theology must reckon, there is something substantial he misses about the problem of evil and how it structures both Arendt's impact on theological debates in the second half of the twentieth

[3] Rather than for his crimes against the Jewish people; on this see Leora Bilsky (2010) and Robaszkiewicz and Weinman (2022: 104–6).

century and her relevance today. Namely, as both Neiman (2002) and Bernstein (1996) show, it is crucial to note (as Kiess does not) just how *and why* postwar political philosophy, moral thought, and popular discourse generally were so silent about the problem of evil.[4] This, from Arendt's perspective, is not merely the actual proper content of the discourse we call (or to which we refer under the sign of) "political theology," but actually the fundamental question of our time. The fact that this was so poorly heard and so little received, despite all the influence Arendt has had, is central to advancing the "fuller, more integrated picture of Arendt" that Kiess calls for and tries to bring about. For this reason, in the rest of this section, I will reconstruct these arguments from Neiman and Bernstein as a supplement to Kiess' overview.

In the opening moments of her instant classic treatment of the problem of evil, offered not so much as a philosophical investigation of a topic (though it is that) but as "an alternative history of philosophy" itself, Neiman (2002: 2) observes that: "In 1945 Arendt wrote that the problem of evil would be the fundamental problem of postwar intellectual life in Europe, but even there her prediction was not quite right. No major philosophical work but Arendt's own appeared on the subject in English, and German and French texts were remarkably oblique." Neiman (2002: 3) recognizes that most philosophers today will find her claim that you can tell the history of modern philosophy through a conceptual analysis of evil and how its meaning changed from the mid-eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century "to be less false than incomprehensible"; for, "the problem of evil is thought to be a theological one [and] such questions have been off-limits to philosophy since Immanuel Kant argued that God, along with many other subjects of classical metaphysics, exceeded the limits of human knowledge." It is precisely this Kantian commitment, I want to show in what follows, that had brought Arendt to engage seriously and substantially with Augustine already before the horrors of the mid-twentieth century, in her 1929 dissertation on the concept of love in Augustine (*Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, published in English translation as *Love and Saint Augustine* only in 1996, more than twenty years after her death). It also brought her back to Augustine again and again, in each of her major mature works and in her last, *The Life of the Mind*.

As Neiman (2002: 68) relates, Kant's steadfast and principled rejection of Leibniz's cause of defending this as "the best of all possible worlds" is not meant

[4] For sure, Kiess (2016: 51) notes that "it may have taken other intellectuals longer to come around [to the importance of the question of evil] than she anticipated," but his longer discussion of the issue seems to entail that, in the long run, the engagement with the problem of evil that she imagined would be required after the Second World War occurred. For reasons that the rest of this section will hopefully show, I do not believe that the reckoning Arendt had in mind is the one that Kiess documents and joins.

so much to refuse theodicy as to diffuse it and led Kant "to insist that faith in a world which coordinates happiness and virtue can't be faith in another world to come but in a transformation of the world we live in." In this, we can see at once why Arendt could say that once she read Kant he was "always looking over her shoulder": Kant's persistent this-worldliness is integral to her long-standing quarrel with Marx and emblematic of her antipathy for any other-worldly or messianic visions in politics, be they Marxist–Hegelian, Socialist, or Zionist. But together with this, Kant's attempt to please neither Leibniz nor Hume while doing justice to the empirical and moral arguments they advance carries with it a constant companion that dissatisfies Arendt. For, Neiman (2002: 83) even if "no one worked harder to show that the question of whether the world is made for us cannot even be properly formulated, no one seems more tempted to give it a positive answer." It is precisely in the face of Kant's inability to dispel this philosophical optimism, and theodicy, once and for all that Arendt is drawn to her appropriation (perhaps, less generously, we could say her decontextualization or even her bastardization) of Augustine's claim that rather than the world being created for human beings, human beings are in order to fashion and refashion the world, giving rise both to time and to history. The this-worldliness of this conviction, however partial an understanding of Augustine's intent in book XII of *City of God*, is a sign that only with Augustine, as she understands him, can the problem of the world and humankind as created and good point to the embrace of freedom in and as natality, which together with plurality is as close to a foundational principle as we can find in Arendt.

This, as Neiman (2002: 111) notes, brings us face to face with "the power of contingency," which is one of two axes (the impotence of God to prevent disasters and suffering being the other) "on which reason falters": here, too, Kant provides inspiration, for "his vision of metaphysics as unending rests on his view that the gap [between is and ought] is permanent" leads him to imagine the relation of the thinking subject "as that of unsatisfied yet unwavering lover." This is one ground of the love of the world that remains Arendt's basic orientation from the 1920s straight through to the end of her life; it is also, as Neiman (2002: 258–67) argues the basis of Arendt's unique response to the putative novelty of Nazi wrongdoing and the Second World War as ending any modern theodicies. The connection between contingency as the source of human freedom and contingency as the source of the love of the world stands at the very center of Neiman's (2002: 261) reading of Arendt and her account of evil more generally, for what Arendt was rejecting in making her own judgment was the desire to remove "the sting of contingency by showing individual misery to be necessary for human history as a whole" as "a way of reconciling us to a world where such misery occurs."

In a recent analysis of *Evil in the Western Philosophical Tradition*, Gavin Rae (2019: 202) also notices this irreducible element of contingency by which

Arendt critically appropriates "the Augustinian–Kantian tradition" and "challenges its claim that evil is grounded in the individual's autonomous will"; Rae's view, however, is that Arendt's account of evil repeats "the basic Augustinian–Kantian claim that the individual can always choose to alter his or her morality and is therefore ultimately responsible for it." On Rae's (2019: 203) reading, this is a weakness of Arendt's account, which requires a turn to post-structuralist and psychoanalytic thinkers—Jacques Lacan and Cornelius Castoriadis in particular—in order to understand "the linguistic structures and practices that structure individual understanding and actions." I, following Arendt's intuition about the ineluctable return of contingency whenever action (rather than behavior) is concerned, believe that Neiman and Bernstein's account of evil—hewing closer to Arendt—ultimately offers a plausible and workable answer to the ongoing impasses that rest beneath Arendt's turn to Augustine.

Yet, even as we must see Arendt, like Jean Améry and Hans Jonas and Theodor W. Adorno, as opposed to any "modern theodicy" as a classical form of consolation and reconciliation, Neiman (2002: 270) insists that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* nevertheless is (as we have seen above) an attempt at theodicy,[5] insofar as: "Resolving to take responsibility for some piece of the world in the absence of convincing metaphysical grounding is part of what it means to grow up in it." Here, we can see the Augustinian orientation behind the appeal to Kantian responsibility and judgment: as human beings we were not born as isolated individuals, we were born into a world, with an unending end in mind: to begin anew, again. Taking up that mantle, as Neiman (2002: 300) understands Arendt, is the only form of reconciliation that could either make sense of events or resolve the question of "whether human beings fit into the world"; it is a form of reconciling not with the past but with the uncertain future. But even though, as Neiman (2002: 300) argues, Arendt believes that any attempt "to show that we are at home in the world would make us too comfortable," it is also the case, as Neiman (2002: 303, 304) also argues, that "Arendt compared the feeling of understanding to the feeling of being at home" and that, in her exchange with Mary McCarthy, Arendt described her experience in writing *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a having been "a curious state of euphoria," which suggests that, for Arendt, facing even the extermination camps, their causes and their effects, we "may be at home in the world after all."

This incongruence was also clear to Richard J. Bernstein (1996), who calls our attention to the disparate directions in which Arendt's analysis of evil in the design and operation of National Socialism before and after the Final Solution takes us, when reading her discussion of radical evil in *Origins*

[5] Or, more precisely, as Neiman (2002: 300), a work that could "formulate the task that might replace theodicy."

together with her argument about evil's banality in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Bernstein (1996: 137) begins, like Neiman, by noting the centrality of the problem of evil for Arendt and the lack of wider attention to this problem, even as her work in general garnered more and more attention over the 1950s and 1960s: "In 1945, Arendt declared: 'The problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe.' She was wrong. Most postwar intellectuals avoided any direct confrontation with the problem of evil. But it did become fundamental for Arendt. She returned to it over and over again, and she was still struggling with it at the time of her death."

Bernstein (1996: 147–48) very helpfully and persuasively points to a famous exchange of letters between Arendt and Karl Jaspers in 1946, surrounding the latter's publication of *Die Schuldfrage* (published in English almost immediately after as: *The Question of German Guilt*) as demonstrative of the ways in which the banality of evil was already on Arendt's mind—because Jaspers uses the phrase himself—before she publishes the first version of the argument about totalitarianism and/as "radical evil" (in the first instance as "absolute" evil, later revised to "radical" (Bernstein (1996: 139–42))). This exchange of letters and the way the same ideas come to be expressed in the introduction to *The Life of the Mind* decades later, Bernstein (1996: 151) concludes, "shows how strikingly Arendt departs from the traditional, entrenched conception of evil understood as a manifestation of 'evil motives.' This departure from the tradition is what is so disturbing in her analysis of the banality of evil. But she had already made the same point about radical evil." By going back to the 1946 correspondence with Jaspers, and in particular Arendt's engagement with Jaspers' discussion of "German guilt," Bernstein persuasively shows that Arendt has not, truly, changed her mind in the twenty years between the end of the catastrophe and the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem.

On this basis, Bernstein (1996: 152) argues that "the question, Did Arendt change her mind?" (that is, between her presentation of the totalitarian experiment as an expression of radical evil and her presentation of the banality of evil) must be answered "emphatically in the negative"; though in saying this, he is no less emphatic that there was a "major shift of focus," from superfluousness (in *Origins*) to thoughtlessness (in *Eichmann*). Bernstein (1996: 153) reconstructs the way in which the central arguments of both works can be read together as a major shift of emphasis rather than as a change of mind thus: "Totalitarianism opens for us the abyss of radical evil, the evil that seeks to make human beings superfluous and even to eradicate the concept of humanity. What is most frightening is that this monstrous deed . . . can result from the thoughtlessness—the inability to think—of ordinary normal people." Here, the first sentence of this abridged summary finding can be read as the central conclusion of *Origins* and the second that of *Eichmann*; framed thus, we can see both why and how there is no "changing of the mind" for Arendt between the two works.

Bernstein thus exposes the same inner tension within Arendt's thought that Neiman exposes when trying to determine whether Arendt, at least as the author of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, does or does not ultimately believe that the exercise of judgment—hers, not the Israeli court's—vindicates her being at home in the world. As Ronald Beiner (1996: 280) notes, this tension (or in his words, "paradox") in Arendt's understanding of human life in terms of both belonging and estrangement not only manifests in her judgment of Eichmann and his trial, but already in *Der Liebesbegriff*, where she reads Augustine as already setting the terms of a love-of-neighbor that appears at least to lead one to equally love the world and view it as a desert. Beiner (1996: 280–81, 284 n.56) suggests that responding to this dynamic tension between loving the world and feeling alienated from it as a source for making a home in this world is the task of both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, as Arendt confronted in both *The Human Condition* and then *The Life of the Mind*. Following this insight, when we "pull back the lens" from both the immediate context of her writings and the controversies surrounding them and the problem of evil as such, we can see that this tension ultimately points to the very question of secularization and Weber's disenchantment thesis that made Augustine's concept of love relevant for her as a dissertation topic. For this reason, we now need to bring the issues raised by Arendt's works of the 1950s and 1960s in this section into conversation with those that motivated her first turn to Augustine as a graduate student in the 1920s.

Liberalism as a Political Theology and its Roots in the Pelagian Controversy

Responding to Kiess' account of Arendt's importance for contemporary theology, and the role of theological arguments in her thinking, expanded and revised through the lessons drawn from Neiman and Bernstein about the reckoning with evil Arendt saw as central and necessary for postwar intellectual life but about which very few other than herself had very much to say for about fifty years, this section aims to demonstrate two points. First, Neiman and Bernstein are both absolutely right to point to the problem of evil as both Arendt's chief and abiding object of interest and her inescapable contribution to moral and political thought. Second, and as Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark also stress in their essay on *Liebesbegriff* (LSA: 131), we need to widen the scope beyond the horrors of the Second World War and take Arendt's undeniably theological analyses of evil back into her doctoral dissertation (published in 1929, before the rise of the National Socialists). When we do so, we see that already before, and then during, the emergence of patterns of action and thinking she would later come to identify as totalitarian Arendt had already come to identify the problem of theodicy as the deepest of the unresolved impasses that bubbled up from underneath the cracks in the foundations

of the liberal and secular order attempting to entrench itself in the wreckage of a rebuilding Europe in the wake of the First World War.

Particularly telling in this regard is Neiman's (2002: 314) observation that the problem of evil continually reemerges in Rawls' work, "despite his own best efforts (and those of his friends) to avoid metaphysical pitfalls," and her contention that this "reemergence" demonstrates that "this engagement was increasingly unavoidable almost in spite of personal inclinations suggests something about the problem of evil itself." Eric Nelson (2019: 51) has recently advanced a rather strong reading of this persistent reemergence of the problem of evil in Rawls' mature works, arguing that the publication of Rawls' "undergraduate senior thesis, *A Brief Inquiry into the Meaning of Sin and Faith*, has given us an invaluable new perspective" on the development of "his idea of 'moral arbitrariness.'" In particular, Nelson (2019: 51) finds it very significant that Rawls develops this crucial element of political philosophy—which Neiman (2002: 310–14) very deftly and concisely summarizes within the horizon of the analysis of contingency highlighted in her alternative history of philosophy as discussed above—"in the context of a fierce attack on the Pelagian heresy." Even if a reader is not entirely persuaded by the degree of emphasis that Nelson wants to place on Rawls' undergraduate thesis—it was, after all, an undergraduate thesis, even if one written by the most important political philosopher trained in the Anglo-American tradition in the mid-twentieth century—what is undeniable is that, just as much as the original liberals or protoliberals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Rawls is still operating within an argumentative space opened up by Augustine in his response to Pelagius and Celestius.

For this reason, the persistence of the Pelagian heresy as foundational for the development of the liberal worldview is surely not simply or solely, or even mostly, important for Rawls as a liberal; it is a problem that all liberals, however explicitly Christian or avowedly secularist, must have in mind when debating the wickedness of the world and the possibility of moral improvement through political progress. Nelson (2019: 5) argues that "those we identify in retrospect as 'protoliberals' arrived at their political commitments because they all, to varying degrees, took the Pelagian side of the theodicy debate. Liberalism, in other words, began life as a theodicy."

Nelson's claims about Rawls in particular are and ought to be read as claims about a very surprising development in one line, perhaps the main line, of what could be called orthodox liberalism as a political theology, at least in his sense. Put baldly, Nelson's (2019: 52) idea is that while "all of the early modern theorists who laid the foundations for what we have come to call 'liberalism'—from Milton to Locke to Kant—were committed Pelagians, Rawls' "orientation was stridently anti-Pelagian." How can we account for this? A partial answer might be to note with Neiman, as discussed above, that Kant himself is, quite literally,

the crucial figure here; to whatever extent he inherits the Pelagian worldview that motivates the theodicy with which liberal thinkers hope to work through the problem of salvation, grace, and foreknowledge, Kant cannot in fairness simply be grouped with the other "protoliberals." But this does not really solve the question of just how strongly and correctly Rawls is identified with the liberalism of Locke and Kant while also being very much on the other side of this crucial debate about the moral fabric of the world. What can, in fact, explain that?

Nelson's (2019: 51) account of this "striking fact" begins with the recognition that "Pelagianism was always regarded as a 'Judaizing' or 'Hebraizing' doctrine. Its enemies saw in it the sin of 'pride'—the prideful insistence of the 'chosen people' that one can follow God's law and earn election without Christological intercession." It is this putative Pelagian pridefulness that prompted, through the doctrine of original sin, the Augustinian orthodoxy that founded and grounded Christendom precisely as the Roman Empire began to recede as a political force. Nelson (2019: 53) argues that while Rawls "was no longer a Christian and certainly had no interest in vindicating the doctrine of original sin" by the time of the publication of *A Theory of Justice* (1971), his "essential anti-Pelagianism remained intact as a habit of mind. When outlining his principle of moral arbitrariness, he straightforwardly returned to the very same language and arguments he had first employed at Princeton thirty years earlier."

But is this "pattern of thought" in Rawls really so telling? Does it really matter for our reception of his theory of justice and his immensely influential defense of liberalism as a political and moral order? Nelson (2019: 66–67) carefully considers the argument that the alignment of thought forms between his anti-Pelagian convictions as a student and his mature defense of moral arbitrariness in his secular political philosophy is ultimately of only superficial interest and that one need not take the anti-Pelagian legacy seriously in responding to his theory of justice as fairness. Nelson (2019: 67) concludes, however, that this view "is nonetheless mistaken," for "when religious arguments are secularized, they tend to leave behind the set of premises that initially made sense of them"; in this case, while "in Rawls' thesis, the uprightness of the upright man is said to be the consequence of the actions of others," it is (for the Augustinian argument that is presupposed for the argument Rawls is advanced in a secularized vein) "God acting through others that makes us act in ways that seem 'deserving.'" For this reason, Nelson (2019: 69) concludes, extrapolating from this example of the theory of agency operative in his account of distributive justice to the way his thought undergirds liberalism as both a political practice and a political philosophy: "The point is not that the mature Rawls continued to accept the doctrine of original sin, but rather that he continued to write and think *as if he did*. And to the extent that many of his disciples have tended to regard human responsibility as quite robust in

the retributive realm and highly attenuated in the distributive realm, they are likewise operating under the shadow of a theological claim."

This last claim concerning how liberals following in the wake of Rawls, of which there are many, operate "under the shadow of a theological claim" cannot help but resonate in our ears with Schmitt's usage of political theology and its influences. I turn to this in the next section, situating Arendt as a central figure in this ongoing debate that begins with Augustine's theology of original sin as a response to the original Pelagians and continuing through the thinkers generally taken to be canonical for political theology: Carl Schmitt, of course, as well as Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin, and Ernst Kantorowicz, though in different ways. We will find that Arendt's appropriation of Augustine offers us a viable and livable way through the Pelagian debate; without Arendt, we might well be left with an Augustinianism, like Rawls', that however completely secularized, is still fighting against Pelagian pridefulness. Arendt, on the other hand, is trying to recover a sense of love of neighbor in Augustine's thought that can provide a different way through the Pelagian debate that is not grounded in original sin and the pathway out of the theodicy debate it pretends to offer.

Arendt's Engagement with Augustine: An Overview of the Coming Chapters

We will turn to Arendt's potential pathway, as she begins to pave it in *Der Liebesbegriff*, in Chapter 1. But first, before concluding this Introduction, let me provisionally answer a question that may well be posed here: why should we, with or without Arendt, bother with Augustine at all, given all the problems we have just, with Nelson, noted in attempts to take on the theodicy debate in contemporary political philosophy? An answer to this in all its fullness, at least within the horizon of Arendt's thinking, can only come with an account of each of the momentous occasions where Arendt turns to Augustine in her work. But the short answer might well be: look at the alternatives. And the two main alternatives we seem to have at hand are Weber's *Entzauberung* ("disenchantment" in the usual translation but maybe more like "demystification" as will be discussed later in this Introduction and in Chapter 1) or Schmitt's rebellion against Weber and the various explicitly and unreconstructedly theological thinkers of the political right, such as the Catholic integralists, or the political left, such as Giorgio Agamben. With that sort of a rock and a hard place as alternatives, Arendt's Augustine is an ally worth searching for sympathetically if skeptically. We can ultimately only understand why Arendt turns to Augustine in her dissertation, and then returns to him again and again, if we see this move as an attempt to work through liberalism's deepest self-contradictions as a form of political theology that seeks individual liberation universally, by means of communally legitimated and inherently particularist constitutional regimes grounded in majoritarian decision-making processes.

In the coming chapters, we read why Augustine is a continual interlocutor for Arendt as she engages different manifestations and dimensions of that tension. First, in Chapter 1, "Weimar Syndrome: *Der Liebesbegriff* and Weber's Disenchantment Thesis," we situate Arendt's first substantial engagement with Augustine as one of a handful of expressions of the need to move beyond the usual horizon of liberal politics emerging in the late Weimar period. Having placed this short and imperfect work in that light, I argue in conversation with Kampowski's (2008: 230) critical construction of Arendt's main line of argumentation there, for all the flaws of her dissertation, its conclusion (we ought to "see the human condition of plurality as a gift rather than a liability" and her esteem for "the human capacity to begin something new") is not just central to the development of her mature thought but also still relevant for what I am here calling Weimar syndrome and better resolving the impasses of liberalism as a political theology.

In Chapter 2, "Paradoxes of Popular Sovereignty: The People's Two Bodies after Weber's False Prophecy of Disenchantment," I develop a reading of sovereignty and agency as they are described in *The Human Condition*, arguing that we can best understand the impossibility that grounds an articulation of the problem of "the people's two bodies" as both a legacy of the medieval and early modern phenomenon of King's Two Bodies classically analyzed by Ernst Kantorowicz and a central tension that remains unresolved at the heart of liberalism's own, quite modern, political theology.

Chapter 3, "Three Antinomies of Liberalism as a Political Theology: Foundations in *Willing*," attempts to unpack the tension analyzed in Chapter 2 by turning our gaze to the Augustinian themes in *The Life of the Mind*. Examining more precisely both what the three antinomies of liberalism as a political theology have to do with major faultline between liberalism (with its commitments to the rule of law and the protection of minorities) and democracy (as the regime in which sovereignty rests in the people and where decisions are made on the basis of majoritarian rule), I show how Arendt offers new insights into how we might yet heal this fault and the resulting chasms that seem to be opening in many or most liberal democracies today.

Then, in Chapter 4, "Constituting and Constituted Power: The Antinomy of Theocratic Faith and Secular Reason in *On Revolution*," these results are compared with the arguments Arendt makes about these matters in *On Revolution*, read together with relevant passages from *Origins* and the last two chapters of *The Human Condition*. The crucial point here will be to see how Arendt's unique understanding of power in contrast to common depictions of "power-over," in particular as the enhancement of capacity via the act of authoritative delegation, can be best understood by attending to the background of these discussions in Augustine, which is often overlooked.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "The *Eschaton* of Liberalism as a Political Theology: Popular Sovereignty Without Exclusion", we recognize the limits of Arendt's partial Augustinianism, focusing on her rejection of James Baldwin's advocacy of a solidaristic politics of love in "Letter from A Region of My Mind" (1962), and how we might draw on her work with Augustine without endorsing this rejection. In addition to Baldwin, the textual counterpoints will be Howard Thurman (1949) and Bayard Rustin (2003), with whom we will engage two central motifs of great importance for the political theology upon which Black liberationist politics rest, which Arendt misses and which are also absent in the usual picture of political theology, emanating from Schmitt and Kantorowicz and, to a lesser extent, Strauss and Voegelin. The first of these, crucial for Thurman, is the figure of Rome and Israel, both in the Biblical contexts of the Exodus story and of Jesus' life in Palestine and in the analogous, or analogized, context of the dehumanization of Black people and peoples by the "secular" powers of Europe and the United States as "legacies of Rome." The second is the revolutionary character of what we generally call the civil rights movement, but Rustin argues we should rather think of the civil rights revolution.

In the Epilogue, "Arendtian Political Theology and Neighbor-love as Political Principle," I aim to bring the insights from Baldwin, Thurman, and Rustin gleaned in Chapter 5 to bear on the limits of Arendt's partial Augustinianism, arguing that it is possible—and necessary—to push Arendt's turn to Augustine beyond the limits she herself imposes. Liberalism as a political theology of this sort, I will argue, examines how it may be possible to constitute a more just and equitable polity. Inspired by Arendt, and informed by the liberationist Black thought with which she engaged but could not ever quite productively respond to, we will see how irremediably irrational aspects of sharing a common world in a plural, democratic society could still point beyond the quandaries we share with her generation of thinkers.

Arendt's Engagement with Augustine: Is it Plausible?

This development of my reading of Arendt's Augustine aims to show that Stephan Kampowski (2008: xviii) is absolutely correct to insist that, beyond the "sheer fact" that Arendt "begins her academic career with a dissertation on Augustine ends it with [a work] in which Augustine plays again a pivotal role," the "acute reader of Arendt" must also note the "symbolic significance of this fact," which, quoting Remo Bodei in his own translation from Italian, is that Arendt's "span of reflection is thus symbolically brought together under the sign of Augustine." Less poetically, perhaps, we will see that Arendt's early attempt to come to terms with a profoundly practical question: "how for Augustine a Christian believer who loves God and has his mind and heart set on the heavens above is still able to love his neighbor in the world below"

(Kampowski 2008: xviii). More especially, we might underscore, the driving question: how is a Christian believer to love their non-baptized, and putatively therefore unsaved, neighbor? And how can we relate this problem of neighbor-love, in the context of what Scott and Stark aptly describe as Augustine's dual citizenship as a Roman and a Christian, to established central themes in Arendt's mature work such as: the world-destroying effects of bureaucratic rationality; the pernicious "rise of the social" at the expense of political concerns and public life; the lost tradition and its enduring relevance in the face of revolutionary thought and action; and how can we judge while situated within the gap between past and future?

Before trying to show how Arendt's Augustine is central to the best answer for the fundamental questions she raises in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, *The Human Condition*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and *Between Past and Future*, we first need some confidence that Arendt's Augustine offers us something we can use. A good proxy for this would be to understand why Arendt time and again returns to a sentence from *City of God* where Augustine writes: "That there be a beginning man was created." This is the essence of natality, a key term, perhaps the key term for Arendt; for this reason, Arendt has reason to bring it to bear in numerous contexts as we will discuss in each of the next four chapters, with each appeal to this sentence requiring its own account given its unique argumentative purpose.

Here and now, in beginning, however, what we need is an account of why it is Augustine that becomes for Arendt the thinker of beginning *par excellence*. Surely, it is not because Arendt is a Christian or believes that Christology holds the key to solving the inner contradictions of liberalism. Rather, as Arendt (LOTM2: 217) makes clearest in the sentence just before the conclusion of the last chapter of the last work she wrote before her untimely and sudden death, Augustine's chief legacy for her is simply that he understood and best expressed what it means to free: Augustine teaches us, she believes, that "we are *doomed* to be free by virtue of being born, no matter whether we like the freedom or abhor its arbitrariness, are 'pleased' with it or prefer to escape its awesome responsibility by electing some form of fatalism." It is true that this has come to be "Arendt's last word" because, finite being that she is, *Judging*, the intended third volume of *The Life of the Mind*, remained only an intended third volume of *The Life of the Mind*.[6] Nevertheless, we cannot deny that it is fitting that Augustine not only returns in each of Arendt's works, but at the very last moment. For, even if it was Kant's "democratic theory of judgment" that formed the nuts and bolts of the account of judgment as the only possible way through the impasses that rest beneath not just theory but also the practice

[6] Notwithstanding the publication of Lectures on Kant's political philosophy (Beiner 1982).

of legitimate democratic rule, it is Augustine who provides the ultimate rationale and the groundless ground of that iterative and unending practice. If, then, there is an Arendtian solution to the Weimar syndrome, we cannot look to Kant or any other "secular" Kantian; we can only look to Augustine. For, as we see in this second to last sentence of her *corpus*, Arendt identifies with, entirely, Augustine's understanding of freedom—convinced not only that he was the first philosopher of the will but also the only Roman thinker to see both the political and philosophical dimensions of freedom in their antagonism, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

All the same, and no less importantly for the argument pursued in the coming four chapters, Arendt rejects the doctrine of grace and the related doctrine of original sin that are foundational for Augustine's understanding of action. Charles Mathewes (2001) examined Arendt's partial adoption and partial disavowal of Augustine, ultimately concluding, essentially, that Arendt's Augustine is interesting and sometimes insightful, but not nearly Augustinian enough and chiefly of value to us in pointing to why we need more Augustine in understanding of evil, freedom and action. In build-up to the crescendo of this argument, Mathewes (2001: 184) first unpacks Arendt's debt to Augustine with respect to what he calls her "more sustained and fruitful arguments" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in particular: these are, in his mind, primarily two: first, "the political and legal argument about the flawed character of the trial as a trial" and how it proved incapable of dealing with Adolf Eichmann as a "special type of crime and criminal"; and, second, a "larger argument, obliquely advanced, about the character of our response to such evil." It is the second of these arguments that is chiefly interesting to us here.[7] In its regard, Mathewes (2001: 192) concludes that Arendt's response to the trial and its inability to secure justice in the face of the criminal's crimes is her unique form of politics as (what Mathewes deems to be) not so much agonal (Honig 1993: 1995) as participatory; he understands her to be arguing for a form of individual commitment to collective action that "must be *participatory*, involving us in the activity of creating a 'world' which is fit for human habitation."

As Mathewes (2001: 178) acknowledges, he owes a large debt here to Jean Bethke Elshtain's (1995) account "of the relation between Augustine's evil and Arendt's Eichmann," to which Elshtain devotes a chapter in her classic book on *Augustine and the Limits of Philosophy*. It is true that Mathewes draws from Elshtain (1995: 51–67) a critique of "the pridefulness of philosophy" that he attributes to Arendt's rejection of anti-Pelagian commitments without which (to his mind) Augustine's account of love, and therefore Arendt's partial Augustinianism cannot cohere; I would aver, however, that Elshtain herself does not

[7] For my views on the first, that is, Arendt's judgment of Eichmann himself and the uniqueness of his crimes, see Robaszkiewicz and Weinman (2022: ch. 5, esp. pp. 95–102).

see Arendt as guilty of the pridefulness for which Augustine is a necessary corrective. Indeed, after quoting Arendt's conviction that "no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a fit place for human habitation"—expressed in the closing moments of *Eichmann*, and discussed through Neiman's discussion of Arendt and feeling at home in the world above—Elshtain (1995: 85) concludes that "Arendt's companion in thought, Augustine, would agree with this sober and poignant conclusion" and, more importantly, perhaps, that in order to understand what Arendt says about radical evil in *Origins* and the banality of evil in *Eichmann*, it is necessary to "have some sense of Augustine's grappling with the question of evil." This supposed agreement on Augustine's part, of course, leaves open the question of the extent to which Arendt agreed with or followed Augustine, or even fully understood him; a question to which we turn in earnest just below and then, especially, in Chapter 1.

For the moment, I want to make clear both what seems to me right in the conclusion about Arendt's partial Augustinianism that Mathewes develops from Elshtain, and what seems to mistaken therein. Seeing both, to my mind, is the best way to see in broad terms that it is worth our time to dig deeper into the Augustinian dimensions not only of *Der Liebesbegriff* (1929), *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), and *The Life of the Mind* (1974/1978) but of Arendt's work more generally. Mathewes (2001: 194) rightly concludes that "What is perhaps most surprising about Arendt's attempt [in the Epilogue to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*] to create a new political vocabulary for our new situation is how very Augustinian (albeit, only partially so) her resulting position turns out to be." Yet his account leaves unsaid what perhaps most needs to be said and what my argument here hopes to vindicate: that Arendt's turn to Augustine, already in her doctoral dissertation and very much in her judgment concerning the Eichmann trial, as well as throughout the course of her writing career, is meant as a response to Weber's disenchantment thesis and the hopelessness of his, and other liberals', project of articulating some sort of value-free social science. It is no accident that nothing about this is to be found here; for, on the account Mathewes (2001: 196) offers, Arendt believed that the "interpretation of natality was not essential to the structure of willing" and therefore "sought in her work to 'demystify' it, to strip it of its theological pretenses and show it to be solely a human capacity—properly miraculous, to be sure, but not in need of any supernatural powers"; in this way, for Mathewes, Arendt becomes yet another Pelagian: "this move—a move which effectively Pelagianizes Augustine—ends up rendering the ontology unsustainable, and the anthropology unintelligible."

In other words, Mathewes argues that Arendt's partial Augustinianism is doomed because she ends up trapped within the same secular politics and "demystified" philosophical anthropology as her fellow post-Weberians. I aim

to show, on the contrary, that Arendt's Augustinianism—though surely partial—is not only one of a series of attempts in her generation to demystify the theological underpinnings of liberal politics in the wake of the First World War but, actually, was in its time, and remains today, our best hope of finding a way out of liberalism's Pelagianism problem. Mathewes ultimately rejects Arendt as a possible source for a way through the problem of evil and salvation because she is not a sufficiently orthodox Augustinian—because she lacks grace, essentially. I hope to show, on the contrary, that we would do better to reject the orthodox Augustinian view while embracing what Arendt—with whatever justice—identifies as the core Augustinian insight into the cosmic and divine underwriting of human freedom as truly the most viable path still open. This is the central contribution Arendt makes to political theology.

The lesson, then, of our reconstruction of a conversation about Arendt and Augustine through the work of Kiess, as a response to Neiman and Bernstein, and Mathewes is that we are now prepared to understand what it means to speak of Arendt as articulating a unique and potentially salutary political theology. This political theology is not, most properly, about how theological concepts pervade political discourse and its practical forms, although that is the terrain on which this scholarly conversation tends to take place today. Rather, political theology is the attempt to come to terms with the persistence of providence as a way of making sense of the world as one world, at a time when we have no confidence that there is an author or creator of that world. My central contention is that Arendt tries to make this case through Augustine as a response to Kant, albeit only episodically and over five decades.

Before turning to the development of that main line of argument, though, let us acknowledge one key concession that must be made to Mathewes in his rejoinder to Arendt and Arendt's Augustinianism, or her purported or partial Augustinianism. Having concluded that Arendt's hopelessly partial Augustine is fundamentally unsalvageable, Mathewes (2001: 196) concludes his chapter on Arendt and (re)turns to "the theological anthropology she thought she could dismiss." It is my contention, however, that this misrepresents both the exact nature of what is admittedly a partial Augustinianism that is to be found in Arendt's thinking. In order to see why, and to understand Augustine's answer to the problem of evil as Arendt understands and seeks to appropriate it, we need to place *Liebesbegriff* in its earlier Weimar context and own the ways in which and reasons for which her embrace of Augustine must remain only partial, even if as Mathewes (2001: 196) believes this led to "her thought's incoherence and failure." When we do so, we see that far from a Weberian demystification of Augustinian providence, Arendt's engagement with Augustine was about searching for both an ontology and an anthropology that could support both the claim that the world is a fundamentally loveable place and that it is a world because of a *superhuman* power of love.

Conclusion

We saw above, with the help of Nelson's recent critical examination of Rawls' undergraduate thesis on Pelagianism and its ongoing relevance not only for his mature work but also for current defenses of distributive justice that Rawls and his followers have an unresolved problem with secularity and the disavowed political theology that clandestinely undergirds much of liberalism. If we agree with Nelson that Rawls and Rawlsian liberals cannot hope to resolve the problem with Pelagianism that Kant had already tried heroically but unsuccessfully to resolve, why should we have any hope in Arendt offering some way through Kant et al.'s impasse with Augustine? A complete argument to this effect will require the careful reconstruction of what I hope to show is Arendt's partially Augustinian political theology, offered in Chapters 1–4, and the extension and correction of this view in Chapter 5 and the Epilogue. In advance, however, we can make clear what I take to be the grounds of hope that Arendt does in fact do better on this point.

The wager of my argument, as it unfolds in the rest of this work, is this: if, in concert with Mathewes (2001), we insist that one cannot understand Arendt's sense of politics as power as freedom without accounting for her strange Augustinianism, and if, at the same time, we reject his conclusion that Arendt's partial Augustinianism is doomed, then we will see both why and how exactly she offers an alternative to political theology in the sense of Benjamin and Schmitt. For this, we turn in Chapter 1 to a discussion of what Benhabib (2018) calls the "Weimar syndrome" and then Arendt's dissertation as a first response to that condition that does not demystify Augustine, even if she does not yet in that text present a coherent view of the ways in which her partial Augustine might yet ground something we could call a liberalism as a political theology, crucially one that does not fall prey to the impasses that liberalism's unsettled business with Pelagianism prevent it from overcoming, as both Mathewes and Nelson demonstrate.

Before taking that step forward into the details of Arendt's argument in *Der Liebesbegriff*, we must first understand the general problematic in which it is situated, namely, the febrile and inchoate crisis of parliamentary democracy as diagnosed by both Max Weber and Carl Schmitt; in particular, we must attend to and understand the impasses through which Arendt meant her reflection on the concept of love in Augustine to offer some possible ways forward. We begin with the help of Seyla Benhabib's (2018) account of "Weimar syndrome," which is symptomatic of the way in which thinkers as different as Schmitt, Morgenthau, Kantorowicz, Strauss, and Benjamin were investigating and attempting, one way or another, to advance beyond the impasses of the liberal non-solution, principally Weber's, to the problems of "political theology." To see how and why this is so, we must turn to Weber's disenchantment thesis and its perennial discontents, discussed in Chapter 1.